

Writing in the Mail on Sunday, the Archbishop reflects on the memorial to British victims of overseas terrorism, which he will dedicate this week at the National Memorial Arboretum.

Three years ago I visited the National Memorial Arboretum to meet families whose loved ones are remembered there, as well as the staff and volunteers who make the UK's centre of remembrance a place of comfort, solace and healing.

On that freezing day, I was profoundly struck by the warmth of humanity I encountered, both in the families and those working to support them.

It was moving and it made a deep impression on me.

This week I'll be returning to the arboretum to dedicate a National Memorial to British Victims of Overseas Terrorism, entitled Still Water.

The event will be hosted by Defence Minister Tobias Ellwood, who has led the delivery of the memorial and whose brother was killed in the 2002 Bali bombing.

As you may recall, Tobias also showed remarkable compassion in rushing to help PC Keith Palmer, who was fatally stabbed during the Westminster terror attack in March last year.

Families of those who have lost someone in terrorist attacks abroad, and others who have been directly affected, will attend Thursday's ceremony.

British nationals have been victims in several terror attacks in recent years.

As well as 9/11 in New York, these include the Mumbai attacks, the shootings at the Bataclan theatre in Paris, the Bali bombings, and the explosions in Moscow's Domodedovo airport.

There are also less well-known incidents.

As I travel around the worldwide Anglican Communion, one of the most moving and humbling experiences for me is meeting the families of those killed by terrorism or in violent conflict.

Nothing can begin to articulate the impact of losing someone in these circumstances.

The trauma that comes from such brutal and sudden loss – with relatives given no chance to say goodbye, to say what really matters – leaves wounds that never fully heal.

For such a thing to happen while this person, who means the world to you, is overseas, is often even more cruel and devastating.

The National Memorial Arboretum offers our nation something so important: it is a place for quiet reflection and remembrance, amid more than 30,000 trees which so beautifully provide a sense of comfort and – I pray – even hope.

Every year, several hundred thousand people make the pilgrimage here to Alrewas, near Lichfield, Staffordshire, and it's easy to understand why.

Quite rightly, the arboretum honours the sacrifices made by our extraordinary Armed Forces.

On my last visit I was struck afresh by the dignity and heroism of those who give their lives for our country, which, by the grace of God, seems to provide comfort to their families as they continue their journey of grief.

Importantly, the arboretum's more than 350 memorials also remember many others who have served, and continue to serve, our nation in all kinds of ways.

Police, ambulance, and fire and rescue staff who have fallen in the line of duty are fittingly remembered.

There are memorials, too, for national charities representing those who have died in particular circumstances, including children.

Each memorial represents scores of personal stories of service, suffering and sacrifice, now intertwined in this remarkably powerful place.

If you follow the news, it can be easy to assume that Britain is a place of division, mistrust and chronic individualism.

That is simply not true, and visiting the arboretum quickly makes that clear.

Walking among those trees, sitting on those benches in the deep silence, you are overwhelmed by what is most true about us as a nation.

We are people bound together by deep values of solidarity and compassion, and when things are tough we have a capacity for love and kindness that no act of terror can ever overcome.

When I visit the arboretum on Thursday, as a Christian my thoughts will also turn to another garden: Gethsemane, where Jesus spent the night before his Crucifixion.

While his disciples slept, Jesus experienced the deepest fear, isolation and suffering, knowing that he was to suffer for our sakes in offering the gift of redemption.

But he also did something that so many of us do in our darkest moments: he prayed. This moment in Jesus's life tells us two really important things.

First, that in Jesus we can be absolutely sure that there no depth of grief and despair that God does not understand.

The more we suffer, the more he draws alongside us, and the more he longs to comfort us – because he has been there too.

And second, that as we know from the resurrection, death is not the final word in our story. It never is, and never will be, because it has been overcome by Christ.

Because Christ is risen, we have eternal hope in a God whose deepest desire is to bring us comfort and healing, and to be in solidarity with us.

We live in a broken world. There will always be suffering – something that the families of those killed in terror attacks know in the most acute and devastating way – but we know this: we are never, never alone.

Recently Tobias Ellwood gave a moving interview in which he described trying to explain the Westminster attack to his son.

His son's question was simple and profound: why did this happen?

His father's answer was as honest as he could be: 'There are some bad people in the world, but there are a lot more good people – and it's the good people who win.'

The existence of evil in our world is very real, as terror victims know all too well. We know this too: goodness can never be defeated.

I look forward to standing alongside others at the memorial this week as we quietly but unshakably contemplate victory of what is good.

5 min read

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